

The story of Lilith

God created all living things, and then he created man. He created a man and a woman and gave them dominion over all things. God named the man Adam, and the woman He named Lilith. Both were formed from the dust of the Earth and in both God breathed the breath of life. They became human souls and God endowed them with the power of speech.

Created at the same time, in the same way, there was no master, no leader, and only bickering between them. Lilith said, "I will not be below you, in life or during sex. I want the superior position." But Adam would not relent and insisted God had created him to be the head of the family and in the affairs of Earth. Lilith was enraged and would not submit.

Then God communed with Adam in the cool of the evening and as he entered into His presence, Adam appealed to God. As God fellowshiped with them, they reasoned together, Adam, Lilith, and the living God. But Lilith would not listen to God or Adam. Seeing that with two people of equal authority there could be no solution, Lilith became frustrated, angry, and intractable. Finally, enraged and defiant, she pronounced the holy and indescribable name of God. Corrupting the power of the name, she flew into the air, changing form, and disappeared, soaring out of sight.

Adam stood alone, confused, praying. "Lord of the universe," he said. "The woman you gave me has run away." At once, God sent the angels Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof to bring her back to Adam. They found her beside the Red Sea, a region abounding in lascivious demons. The angels ordered Lilith to come with them in the name and by the authority of the most high God, but she refused. As her rebellion increased, she changed, becoming more and more demonic.

God spoke into Lilith's heart, saying, "You have chosen this evil path, and so shall you become evil. You are cursed from now until the end of days." Lilith spoke to the angels and said, "I have become this, created to cause sickness, to kill children, which I will never have, and to torment men." With these words, she completed her demonic transformation. Her form was that of a succubus.

Confined to the night, she was destined to roam the Earth, seeking newborn babies, stealing their lives, and strangling them in their sleep. She torments men even now, causing lust and evil dreams. Her rebellious and evil spirit forever traps her. Bound in the darkness of her own heart, Lilith became the mistress and lover to legions of demons. And Adam's countenance fell and he mourned for he had loved Lilith, and he was again alone and lonely.

Some say that Lilith ruled as queen in Zmargad, and again in Sheba; and was the demoness who destroyed Job's sons. Yet she escaped the curse of death which overtook Adam, since they

had parted long before the Fall. Lilith not only strangles infants, but also seduces dreaming men, any one of whom, sleeping alone, may become her victim.

The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* Question #5 (23a-b)

Tr. Norman Bronznick (with David Stern & Mark Jay Mirsky) ([Stern90](#))

The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is the earliest form we know of the Lilith legend familiar to most people (that is, to most people who are familiar with Lilith at all). It is here that we find Lilith as Adam's first wife. Scholars tend to date the *Alphabet* between the 8th and 10th centuries, CE. Whether the story itself is older, or, if so, how much older is not possible to say. Amulets like the one described in the first paragraph are, of course, much older. The author of the *Zohar*, R. Moses de Leon, was aware of the *Alphabet's* version of Lilith, at least according to Gershom Scholem (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 174), but he also knows other, probably older, Lilith traditions which do not mesh well with this one. No attempt is made, apparently, to harmonize them. For one of these other traditions, and comments on whether the author was familiar with the *Alphabet*, see [Treatise on the Left Emanation](#). The idea of Eve having a predecessor is also not new to Ben Sira, and can be found in [Genesis Rabbah](#). But those traditions make no mention of Lilith, and, in fact, do not mesh well with Ben Sira's version of the story. [AH]

Soon afterward, the young son of the king took ill, Said Nebuchadnezzar, "Heal my son. If you don't, I will kill you." Ben Sira immediately sat down and wrote an amulet with the Holy Name, and he inscribed on it the angels in charge of medicine by their names, forms and images, and by their wings, hands, and feet. Nebuchadnezzar looked at the amulet. "Who are these?"

"The angles who are in charge of medicine: Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof. After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, '*It is not good for man to be alone*' (Gen. 2:18). He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while am to be in the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.' At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angles to bring her back.

"Said the Holy One to Adam, 'If she agrees to come back, fine. If not she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day.' The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea, in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God's word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, 'We shall drown you in the sea.'

"'Leave me!' she said. 'I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days.'

“When the angels heard Lilith’s words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: ‘Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant.’ She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels’ names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers.”

Direct or Possible Biblical References

Isaiah 34:14*f*

Wildcats shall meet with hyenas,
goat-demons shall call to each other;
there too Lilith shall repose,
and find a place to rest.
There shall the owl nest
and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow

NRSV